

April 9, 2023

Greetings, Western Carolina University faculty colleague!

Western Carolina University faculty are among the best educators, scholars, and community members of any institution of higher education where I have been able to engage. The dedication of faculty members to their students, this region, their professions, and each other is humbling to observe. I recently had the opportunity to hear from a WCU alumna who was asked to talk about how WCU prepared her for her current life. She, enthusiastically, told three stories, all of which highlighted meaningful interactions with faculty. Now, I have also heard amazing stories of the impact of our student affairs and administrative ranks. But, having served in all of these roles over the course of my career, I recognize the uniqueness of the tasks that faculty undertake. We teach, we engage in scholarly and creative activity, and we are called to serve our departments, colleges, university, regions, and chosen disciplines. But, we also mentor students, not just about their professional lives but their personal development. We form bonds with students and also with their families. Through these relationships we foster secure places for the discomfort necessary for growth, both cognitive and psychosocial, to occur.

We, however, accomplish none of this alone. Our work is, necessarily, in concert with many stakeholders within higher education, including: students, staff, administration, family and friends of our students, funding agencies, government bodies, K-12 educators, community college colleagues, compliance agencies, and many more. Institutions of higher education in the United States are unique organizations which have an embedded system of shared governance that provides a structure for input on various aspects of the institution by key stakeholders based on personal expertise and positional spheres of influence. This shared governance model centers the voices of faculty (via faculty senate and other avenues), staff (via staff senate and other avenues), students (via student government), and administration (via executive councils, boards of trustees, and other avenues). This system works most effectively when there is trust, open communication, both shared and divided authority (depending on topic and expertise), and continuous work from all constituent groups. While shared governance has decreased in power at many institutions due to both internal and external factors over the past few decades, I am pleased to say that this ethos still exists in a significant way at WCU. It speaks to the sense of community our students feel, it harkens from the inviting way faculty and staff are welcomed into the working ranks, and it highlights a shared commitment by all involved to consider our students in all we do.

Shared governance is always important but sometimes it is easy to overlook it and allow others to make us feel powerless. We often feel pressures from so many outside stakeholders to higher education, broadly, and our institutions, specifically, that it is difficult to recognize the power and responsibilities we have from and to this system of shared governance. This year, I aim to strengthen faculty understanding of shared governance, and the possibilities that exist within its structure for us to continue our partnership in supporting our students, this

region, and our disciplines while strengthening future opportunities to sustain quality practice and influence change where necessary. To this end, I encourage you to pay attention to the work of the administration, of student government, of staff senate, and of faculty senate. Be in communication with faculty senate leadership (including me), your particular faculty senators that represent your area of the institution, and your representatives to university-wide committees that might be convened outside the scope of faculty senate. Share questions, come with ideas, and listen. Information on communicating with faculty senate, including lists of leadership and senators with contact information can be found on at facultysenate.wcu.edu. Meeting schedules, meeting agendas, resolutions, meeting minutes, and more are also available.

I look forward to serving you and working alongside you this academic year. Please reach out to facultysenate@wcu.edu any time to connect.

Best.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Y Gulley', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Yancey Gulley, Ph.D. (he/him/his)
Chair of the Faculty, 2023-2024